



**Minutes**  
**The Maryland Council for New Americans**  
Marriott International  
10400 Fernwood Road  
Bethesda, Maryland 20817  
June 16, 2009 10:00am – 12:00pm

**1. Opening Remarks and Welcome**

County Executive Isiah Leggett welcomed the Council. Attendees included: Pastor Claudia Ballard, Harold Brinkley, Ricardo Flores, Commissioner David Gray, Young-Chan Han, Lenneal Henderson, Simone Johnson, Pastor Jamila Woods-Jones, Margaret Kim, Angela Lagdameo, Michael Lin, Robin McKinney, Adam Ortiz, Amjad Riar, Jimmie Walton Paschall, Rabbie Stuart Weinblatt, Anna White

**2. Report from Citizenship Working Group and Council Discussion**

Anna Anderson reiterated the 5 recommendations from the Citizenship Working Group that were detailed at the last Council meeting:

1. Establish and Fund the New Americans Initiative for Maryland (Secretary Perez asked that we refer to this as a statewide partnership on naturalization)
2. Lead a public education campaign through the New Americans Initiative
3. Ensure that there is access to low-cost and high-quality ESOL classes
4. Reduce the financial burden on LPRs
5. Establish regular community meetings with USCIS to improve access to the naturalization process

She asked feedback from the Council on how the state, community, business, and private partners can fund a statewide naturalization plan, with emphasis on reducing the financial burden on LPRs.

County Executive Isiah Leggett asked the Council for a proposal on the future structure of the Council. The Council suggested the following:

- Explore how a formalized structure would be codified (by Executive Order, Legislation, other)
- The Governor should establish an office for new Americans for the State
- The New Americans Council should be permanent
- The office should have an Executive Director/Cabinet level position that reports directly to the Governor

### **3. Report from Financial Services Working Group and Council Discussion**

Robin McKinney described the progress of the Working Group that reflected recently conducted data collection and interviews.

Recommendations will surround enhancing access to mainstream financial services through the collection of data (disclosed voluntarily) for new Americans. The State should identify best practices and the community with the services providers that are models. Robin emphasized that the information must be disclosed voluntarily in order to strike the balance between being useful and invasive.

From speaking with the Comptroller's Office, the Working Group discovered there is a higher proportion of paper filing rather than electronic filing, "self-prepared" taxes, and a high number of fraudulent tax returns with the new Americans populations. The Working Group is focusing on recommendations that will increase electronic filing and identify licensed paid tax preparers. It is important that the State keep track of who is preparing taxes. The Comptroller's office is willing to create a basic presentation that they could deliver through cultural and faith-based institutions about basic rights and responsibilities of tax system. The presentation would ideally be in multiple languages and culturally appropriate.

Robin mentioned that there are opportunities for new Americans to included in existing efforts:

- MSDE Task Force to Study Financial Literacy (passed last year)--financial education should be integrated in K-12 education.
- UM School of Social Work and DHCD – community fellows to go to various county action agencies and figuring out how to leverage agencies that connect with new Americans

As a follow-up and request from Chairs Perez and Leggett, the Working Group looked into Microloans and various scams. The group found that microloans have been successful in some communities. However, there are very few strong programs in Maryland.

### **4. Report from Workforce Working Group and Council Discussion**

Dr. Amjad Riar, Chair led a discussion on the following questions:

- How can private employers, nonprofits, philanthropy and educators collaborate better on English teaching and other workforce preparation?
- In health care policy, there is a national movement to make medical records electronic so doctors can review medical histories adequately and provide the best advice. We have been talking about doing the same for workers who seek state employment or training services, are going through the citizenship process, or

attend state funded educational institution. What information should be tracked and how could it be used for the worker's benefit?

Dr. Michael Lin mentioned that Montgomery County is looking to establish a New American institute which would serve as a one stop where new Americans can provide guidance, counseling. Commissioner David Gray also said that libraries are good entry points for services. This was confirmed as an operative model by Lily Qi and Karla Silvestre from Montgomery County.

Dr. Lenneal Henderson said it is important to investigate what community colleges, UM University College is doing. Other suggestions included identifying unions, trade associations, professional orgs to capture methods of outreach and integration of new Americans.

## **5. Report from Governmental Access Working Group and Council Discussion**

Anna White overviewed 3 current recommendations:

1. Data collection. She described the need for collecting data on ethnicity, language spoken at home, English-proficiency for clients of state agencies, with emphasis on training staff to do data collection and educating the public about data.
2. Language action plans. White said each agency should be required to have the language action plan in place. She also described needs for documents translated into languages, use of a language bank similar to Baltimore City, keeping agencies accountable for implementing language action plan, and the possibility of a language access coordinator in the Governor's Office of Community Initiatives.
3. Structure of Council. Though the Council spoke about this, she said that there are three points that the Government Access Work Group talked about:
  - A Special Secretary Position with a staff
  - A stand-alone Council as an on-going Policy body
  - Executive Director with an Advisory board (similar to what the Council recommended)

She stressed that there needs to be a new organizational structure. White clarified that there should be one language access coordinator for ALL state agencies. Ricardo Flores stressed that this person(s) should have oversight, investigatory powers because there are challenges within DC language access where the Office of Civil Rights position that has cabinet level oversight and that person does their best to investigate infractions of language access. Benoy Thomas felt that the system in DC is a good model where

training takes 15 minutes and it is relatively expedient to have a 3-way call between client, government employee, and interpreter.

White inquired to County Executive Leggett: How do we encourage individuals to participate in giving data, when some are reluctant because of distrust of authority or language barriers? Leggett commented that there is currently difficulty regarding encouraging populations to participate in Census 2010. Karla Silvestre said that the Government Access Working Group is examining the model of Kaiser Permanente which has done a lot of work on ethnic data, training with staff so customers can understand why data is being collected. Montgomery County has a 10-point compliance checklist for all departments

## **6. Report Guidelines, Timeline, Logistics**

County Executive Leggett stressed that the report can provide framework, basic recommendations, and processes. He said that the key to the report is not to solve all the problems but to provide a roadmap for policymakers to follow. Leggett stressed the following:

### Important information about the final report:

- The final report will not be released until Governor O'Malley has received it. Prior to the Governor receiving the report, it should be discussed as "Draft Report"
- Report itself will be directed to the government.
- The final report will be in different languages.

## **REMAINING TIMELINE**

### **The County Executive Requested for all Council Members to Save these dates:**

**July 9** Council Meeting in Baltimore to review and discuss Draft Report  
\*\*\* Draft Report will be sent prior to the meeting.

**Location: 400 E. Pratt Street, Suite 606 Baltimore, MD 21202**

**Time: 10:00am-12:00pm**

**July 20** Backup date in case we need further review

**July 28** Additional backup "final drop date"